

University of Groningen

European Philosophy of Science Association, 6–9 September

Lisciandra, Chiara

Published in:
The Reasoner

IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Publication date:
2017

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Lisciandra, C. (2017). European Philosophy of Science Association, 6–9 September. *The Reasoner*, 11(10), 76–77.

Copyright

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

Take-down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.

THE REASONER

VOLUME 11, NUMBER 10

OCTOBER 2017

thereasoner.org

ISSN 1757-0522

CONTENTS

Editorial

Features

The Reasoner Speculates

News

Dissemination Corner

What's Hot in ...

Events

Courses and Programmes

Jobs and Studentships

72 a seminar talk on experientialism about moral concepts. We had great scientific discussions afterwards on his recent book 'Humean Nature' afterwards and I organized a book symposium for Neil in July 2017 at CSSA to continue these discussions. The interview with Neil aims at giving the readers of The Reasoner an overview of some of his main arguments spelled out in 'Humean Nature'. I'll be happy to meet Neil again in March 2018 to give a seminar talk at the National University of Singapore after a 1-month visiting research stay at the Macquarie University Research Centre for Agency, Values, and Ethics (CAVE).

ANIKA FIEBICH

Centre for the Study of Social Action, University of Milan

78

80

80

81

FEATURES

Interview with Neil Sinhababu

ANIKA FIEBICH: Neil, how did you get into research?

NEIL SINHABABU: My research concerns whether there is objective moral truth, and if so, how we can know it. This question seemed awesome to me from my first year in college. I moved out of the sciences and into philosophy to explore it.

AF: Ah, so what did you do before doing philosophy?

NS: I thought I'd go into some part of the sciences – perhaps biology, which I'd been good at in high school. My father was an organic chemist who worked in the pharmaceutical industry, and I expected to do something similar. But I took a class on Nietzsche at the same time that I took second-semester organic chemistry, and I couldn't focus on my chemistry homework because I was thinking about philosophy all the time. I switched over to philosophy after that and I've been thinking about it ever since.

AF: What are your general research interests?

EDITORIAL

For this month's issue of The Reasoner, I'm happy to interview Neil Sinhababu. Neil is associate professor of Philosophy at the National University of Singapore. His research focuses on questions in moral philosophy, like e.g., the question whether and if so, how we can know about objective moral truth, and a number of his works are inspired by Nietzsche and Hume. I met Neil at the Centre for the Study of Social Action (CSSA) at the University of Milan in Italy in May 2017 where he gave



NS: Answering this question requires exploring a very broad range of issues about knowledge, facts, and human psychology, as well as specifically moral topics. Metaethics is the area where all these things come together, and it's my main area of research. Some of my research concerns the nonmoral questions in these areas by themselves, but I usually get interested in them by seeing their relations to the moral questions.

AF: What was your motivation to write *Humean Nature*?

NS: I wrote *Humean Nature* because I thought the search for objective moral facts was being led astray by incorrect psychological theories, and I wanted to set things right. Many philosophers agree with Immanuel Kant and other rationalists that moral judgments are beliefs about objective reasons for action, which can motivate us without any assistance from a pre-existing desire. I think David Hume is right that the thoughts and feelings accompanying both moral and nonmoral motivation are evidence of pre-existing desires driving us in both cases. Our theories of moral judgment need to recognize this. Combining rationalist views of moral judgment with a Humean view of human psychology gives the result that humans are psychologically incapable of making moral judgments! So, if the Humean view is empirically well-supported, we have to get rid of the rationalist view of moral judgment.

Some of the ideas in the book have interested psychologists who aren't especially concerned with the moral questions. If the book ends up being useful to them, that'll be wonderful! I tried to write it in an accessible style so that readers from psychology and other areas wouldn't be confused by unexplained philosophical terminology.

AF: In *Humean Nature* you describe how desire drives our actions, thoughts and feelings as well as how passion explains motivation and reasoning. Here you follow David Hume. In which respect does your account draw on Hume and in which respect does it differ?

NS: I'm presenting an updated version of Hume's view that desire – or as he called it, passion – drives everything we do. Some of his ideas about how vivid representations of a passion's object increase the passion's intensity are helpful improvements upon today's theories, and I've used those in the book. On other issues, psychology has moved past Hume, but his basic ideas can be helpful even we understand things like desire's relation to pleasure in a more modern way.

One big point of disagreement between us concerns whether morality is about objective facts. I think so and he'd disagree. But I've tried to develop an account of moral judgment that treats moral judgments as beliefs about objective facts, while fitting nicely within his psychological picture.

AF: In your book you discuss how the properties of desire can explain various psychological phenomena, including intention, willpower, daydreaming and selfhood. How can the properties of desire explain intention, for example?

NS: One big issue concerns how desire can explain the role of intentions in our plans for the future. As Michael Bratman noted, intending to do something goes along with planning ways to do it, and planning for how to deal with the consequences. Bratman didn't think desire could explain this, so he advanced a view of intention that didn't treat it as a kind of desire.

AF: I remember that your chapter on desire starts with a letter to Michael Bratman, doesn't it?

NS: Yes, that is right. I respond to Bratman by noting the role of desire in directing our attention. If you're hungry, you'll

pay attention to food, looking at food if it's nearby and thinking about what you'd like to eat even if it isn't nearby. This is why hunger can get you start thinking about where to eat. If there's a restaurant with tasty food nearby, but your friend recently got food poisoning there, your desire to not get sick will direct your attention to that fact as well, and you'll have some motivation not to go there. I tell Bratman that the role of desire in directing attention makes it useful for explaining how we plan.

AF: What are the implications of the resulting psychological picture that you draw for theories of moral judgments?

NS: The book presents a big psychological argument against views on which moral judgment is a belief that can motivate action by itself. These views have turned meta-ethics into a search for objective reasons for action. I see this as a big mistake, driven partly by confusion about the role that beliefs about such reasons might play in human psychology. When philosophers don't find objective reasons of the right kind, they may conclude that moral judgment is always mistaken or that these reasons exist as non-natural additions to the natural world that we can intuitively grasp.

AF: Do you think that moral judgments are about objective reasons for action at all?

NS: No. I argue that moral judgments are about when feelings like guilt, horror, and admiration accurately represent objective reality. Most of my arguments come from the role that recent experiments suggest moral feeling plays in causing moral judgment, which seem surprisingly similar to the causal role that color experience plays in causing color belief. This causal role enables color experience to give you a grasp of color concepts – you wouldn't fully master the concept of yellow if you didn't know what the experience of yellow was like. And you wouldn't fully master the concept of wrongness if you didn't know what guilt was like.

AF: You say that when we feel guilty about our action, it feels like we've done something wrong. If our feeling is accurate, we did something wrong. But what about the case when our feeling is inaccurate, like an illusion, if we didn't do anything wrong?

NS: It's not that discovering the accuracy-conditions of moral belief will be easy – there are a lot of ways you could go where it seems to get you into the same old problems! But I'm convinced that it's more tractable, because it gets you away from reasons and into the philosophy of perception, where new theoretical options are available. I plan to explain how this all works in the book after *Humean Nature*.



Stanley and the Stakes Hypothesis

Jason Stanley (2005: *Knowledge and Practical Interests*, Oxford University Press) has argued for pragmatic encroachment (PE). PE is the view that knowledge depends intrinsically on practical factors. The view is motivated by cases where it is supposed that what an agent is doing has significance with respect to what they know. Allegedly, by examining pairs of cases that differ only in terms of the stakes involved, we can see that such variation in stakes results in knowledge being present

or absent. Consider these cases:

HANNAH AND SARAH 1: Hannah and her wife Sarah are driving home on a Friday afternoon. They plan to stop at the bank on the way home to deposit their paychecks. It is not important that they do so, as they have no impending bills. But as they drive past the bank, they notice that the lines inside are very long, as they often are on Friday afternoons. Realizing that it isn't very important that they paychecks are deposited right away, Hannah says, 'I know the bank will be open tomorrow, since I was there just two weeks ago on Saturday morning. So we can deposit our paychecks tomorrow morning (2005, 3-4).'

HANNAH AND SARAH 2: Hannah and her wife Sarah are driving home on a Friday afternoon. They plan to stop at the bank on the way home to deposit their paychecks. Since they have an impending bill coming due, and very little in their account, it is very important that they deposit their paychecks by Saturday. Hannah notes that she was at the bank two week before on a Saturday morning, and it was open. But, as Sarah points out, banks do change their hours. Hannah says, 'I guess you're right. I do not know that the bank will be open tomorrow (2005, 4).'

Hannah supposedly knows that the bank will be open tomorrow in the first case, but not in thesecond, because of the difference in the practical interests (Stanley (2005) and Hawthorne and Stanley (2008: Knowledge and Action, The Journal of Philosophy 105, 571-590)). More generally, in low stakes situations knowledge is taken to be more prevalent than in higher stakes situations. Let us call this idea the low/high stakes hypothesis:

(LHSH) Lower stakes correlate with knowledge and higher stakes correlate lack of knowledge.

Whatever one says about PE itself, there are cases that show that LHSH is implausible. In other words, there are epistemically identical cases where it is plausible to claim that knowledge correlates with high stakes not low stakes. Consider these cases:

LOUISA 1: Louisa has leukemia and has been through the standard protocol of chemotherapy. She subsequently relapsed. Her doctors offer her an experimental treatment with some minor known side-effects and for which they have only some modestly positive anecdotal information regarding efficacy. If she does nothing she will die very soon. She says 'I know that the treatment will work, so I should take it.'

LOUISA 2: Louisa has leukemia and has been through the standard protocol of chemotherapy. The treatment has been successful and she shows no sign of relapse. Her doctors offer her an experimental treatment with some minor side-effects and for which they only have some modestly positive anecdotal information regarding efficacy. If she does nothing she will continue as is with some risk of relapse. She says 'I do not know that the treatment will work, so I should not take it.'

LOUISA 1 is a higher stakes case than LOUISA 2. But, it seems reasonable to say that Louisa has knowledge in LOUISA 1 but not in LOUISA 2 contra LHSH. This is precisely because the stakes are so high in LOUISA 1 that to be rational she must act by taking the experimental treatment. She knows then according to the knowledge norm of practical reason (KN-PR):



(KN-PR) One should act on a proposition, if and only if, it is known.
Stanley (2005: 9-10)

But, it would be irrational for her to take the treatment in LOUISA 2. Thus, she knows in LOUISA 1 even though she does not know in LOUISA 2 and the stakes are higher in the first case.

This is not entirely surprising. In decision situations where probabilities cannot be meaningfully assigned to outcomes (other than that they are non-zero) advice about what to do is wholly a function of utilities because no expected utilities can be calculated therein. In such cases where the potential losses are great the maximin rule is applies:

(MR) maximize the minimum utility outcome.
Resnik (1987: Choices, University of Minneapolis Press, 26-27)

Where T is 'take the treatment', E is 'the treatment is efficacious', D is 'dies', I is 'condition improves', F is 'is effected by minor side-effects' and S is 'condition stays the same' we can characterize LOUISA 1 as follows:

	E	$\neg E$
T	$I \& F$	D
$\neg T$	D	D

Assume the following relative ordering of utilities: $V(I) > V(I \& F) > V(S) > V(S \& F) > V(F) > V(D)$. MR tells us to look at the worst outcomes of the acts given the relevant states of the world. For $\neg T$ we get both $(\neg T \& E)$ and $(T \& \neg E)$ and for T we get $(T \& \neg E)$. But these values are equal. By the lexical MR we then look at the next lowest outcome(s) of $\neg T$ and T . In the case of T we get $(T \& E)$ and there is no better outcome for $\neg T$. So, the MR tells us that it is maximally rational for Louisa to do T . For LOUISA 2 we have:

	E	$\neg E$
T	$S \& F$	$S \& F$
$\neg T$	S	S

Applying MR we see that we have a maximal minima for $\neg T$ at $(\neg T \& E)$ and $(T \& \neg E)$ and this is the case for T as well. So, according to the MR to be maximally rational Louisa should do $\neg T$.

MICHAEL SHAFFER
St. Cloud State University

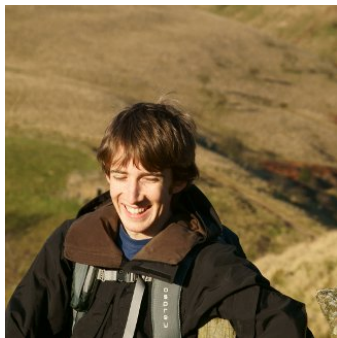
Leaky abstractions in the foundations of decision theory

There are two main approaches to basic framework for decision theory in philosophy. Savage's framework takes there to be three kinds of things: acts, states and outcomes. States are the things that determine how successful your actions are, outcomes are the things you are trying to bring about or avoid by acting.

Acts are thought of as functions from states to outcomes: an act brings about a particular outcome in a particular state of the world. We might say that outcomes are the objects of desire, the states are the objects of belief and the acts are objects of choice. An alternative view – that espoused by Richard Jeffrey – is to take everything to be a proposition. Some propositions are distinguished by the fact that you have it in your power to make them true or false at will: these will be the acts. Acts will in fact be conjunctions of dependency hypotheses of some sort: “if the state is x, then a will eventuate; if the state is y then b will eventuate...” Whether something is a state or an outcome depends not on what sort of thing it is, but on what sort of influence it has on the structure of your preferences. How do these frameworks relate?

Well, here's an analogy. Think about an integrated circuit. Everything is just a number: the machine code instructions, the data, the addresses of the data... Or not even: everything is just a particular configuration of particular parts of physical computer memory. Certain configurations of high/low current are understood as representing certain binary digits 1 or 0 which are interpreted as numbers. But, what makes things work is the way the number is treated: that's what makes something a machine code, or an address or what have you. A number in memory is treated as an instruction if, when it is read, it leads to particular transistors to turn particular circuits on or off. What makes some number a piece of data is if it is used to decide whether to send a high or a low signal through those circuits controlled by the instruction. What makes a number a memory address is if the instruction that preceded it is the sort of instruction that takes an address as an argument. (Charles Petzold does an excellent job of explaining computer architecture in his book “Code”: a book I would recommend to anybody who spends a significant amount of their time on a computer.)

In the same way, despite acts, outcomes and states all being the same sort of things on Jeffrey's view, they are dealt with differently. Indeed, one might think of Savage's approach as formalising the separation that is implicit in the attitudes we have to the various kinds of Jeffrey propositions. To stretch the analogy further, higher level computer programming languages will abstract away from the machine code. This involves distinguishing different kinds of entities (often called types). So despite the fact that everything is fundamentally a number, some kinds of symbols will be used to refer to instructions, some other method will be used for referencing addresses, and



some other way to indicate an actual number. Higher level programming languages will have different kinds of objects: strings, floating point numbers, signed integers, unsigned integers, lists... These are all, at base, numbers in memory, but it's useful to have different shortcut methods for manipulating them, since they need to be treated differently. If two numbers are representing particular strings of letters, then it doesn't make sense to add them together. You can do it, but the result doesn't have any meaningful interpretation. (Annoyingly, the “+” operator is often overloaded to do string concatenation, instead of adding the underlying numbers together...)

I think the same sort of thing is going on in the relationship between the decision theory frameworks. Everything can be thought of, at base, as a proposition. But some kinds of propositions we want to think of as events, and their logical structure and interrelationships are important. For other propositions – e.g. the acts – it is the preference structure over them which is important to us.

Often, the abstraction of treating different kinds of propositions as different is a legitimate move: things are conceptually simpler. Savage sets things up in this simple way. But it is a “leaky abstraction” as all abstractions are. What this means is that in the edge cases, in the unusual circumstances, the abstraction breaks down. For example, when the acts are not independent of the states, the basic Savage set up will go haywire (and we need to shift to something like causal decision theory). And when this happens, all sorts of strange behaviour can emerge. So we can think of Savage's tripartite distinction as an abstraction of Jeffrey's single-type system. I think this is an illuminating way of thinking about the relationship between the two camps.

SEAMUS BRADLEY

Philosophy, University of Tilburg

NEWS

International Network for Economic Methodology, 28–30 August

At the end of August, philosophers and social scientists convened in San Sebastián for the biannual International Network for Economic Methodology (INEM) conference. The conference was hosted at Palacio Miramar from the 28th till the 30th of August. The event provided attendants with an opportunity to discuss and reflect upon past, current and future developments in economics.

Preceding the conference, the Philosophy of Economics working group of the Young Scholars Initiative (Institute for New Economic Thinking) organized a workshop for (especially) young scholars. In the wake of INEM, participants discussed issues related to capitalism, technology and even scientism. Sonja Amadae (MIT and TINT, University of Helsinki) gave a keynote talk in which she discussed how to assess the validity of (behavioral) economic



models. When looking for instance at the financial crisis, it seems that economic models have failed considerably. Sonja concluded that there may be two plausible explanations. Either our models are too narrow, and thus not able to capture all possible preferences and actions, or the models' implementation is faulty.

In discussing these issues, the workshop was a great build-up to the conference. The organizing team, consisting of Nicola Craigs (Durham University), Julian Reiss (Durham University) and David Teira (UNED), set up a program that highlighted the diversity, as well as the quality of the field. The eleven parallel sessions were structured around themes in which—amongst others—issues of modelling, ethics, evidence, measurement, philosophy of science and rationality were discussed. Each session included three paper presentations. Participants (about 70 in total) from all over the world ranged from PhD students to established professors.

In her keynote, Diane Coyle (University of Manchester/BBC/Enlightenment Economics) discussed issues similar to those addressed by Sonja Amadae, on economic decision-making and economic models, but from a different perspective. According to Diane, it is especially welfare theories that warrant our attention as they fail to account for current developments in society.

Diane argued that the economy is becoming more complex as a consequence of, for example, technological change. These changes pose new questions—related to the market power of online markets and digital networks, social media, the growth of cities etc.—that both academics and policy makers need to answer. Diane pointed out, however, that the welfare theories that should provide these answers are unable to do so. It is therefore not the rational agent assumption that poses the main challenge

To conclude, many new and innovative ideas on economics and philosophy have circulated during the three days of INEM. The nice atmosphere and the interdisciplinary environment invited for thought-provoking talks and discussions. I can say that I could not be happier to have had my first conference in San Sebastián. I am looking forward to seeing you again in two years!

JULIETTE R. DE WIT
University of Groningen

European Philosophy of Science Association, 6–9 September

The Sixth Edition of the European Philosophy of Science Association (EPSA) Conference took place in Exeter, UK, from 6 to 9 September. The event is probably the largest biennial conference in the field of philosophy of science in Europe, this year hosting more than 300 participants from all over the world. The organization of such a big event was made possible thanks to the joint efforts of the EPSA programme committee,



co-chaired by Thomas Reydon and David Teira, and of the local committee consisting of Adam Toon, Sabina Leonelli, John Dupré, Shane Glackin, Staffan Muller-Wille and Chee Wong, from the Exeter Centre for the Study of the Life Sciences.

The conference venue was the beautiful Streatham Campus of the University of Exeter: a magnificent botanic garden, surrounded by lakes, parkland, and woodlands, with exotic trees and art sculptures amid modern university buildings.

In his opening speech, the outgoing EPSA President Stephan Hartmann gave us an overview of the current state of the Association and of the conference ahead. In addition to the three keynote speakers—Sonja Amadae, Philip Kitcher and Margaret Morrison—the programme featured some 120 contributed papers, 14 symposia and 26 posters. The conference was designed to showcase the state of the art in philosophy of science and to connect scholars, aiming to create an independent community of philosophers of science in Europe.

Several satellite events were scheduled between the regular sessions. *The Women's Caucus* organized both an informal breakfast and an evening lecture, where Helen Beebe discussed the problem of the under-representation of women in philosophy of science and what we could do to improve it. A special lunch session discussed how to write ERC grants, and in yet another session the two new editors of EJPS, Phyllis Illari and Federica Russo, presented their vision for the journal for the coming years.

Going back to the keynotes, in her lecture, **Margaret Morrison** renewed a central debate in philosophy of science about experiments and simulations. By looking at the research conducted with the Large Hadron Collider by physicists working at CERN, she challenged the dichotomy between simulations and experiments that is often referred to in the literature. As clearly emerges from the work at CERN, an enormous amount of results from simulated data was crucial to the discovery of the Higgs boson. Experiments and simulations turn out to be so intertwined, that it becomes questionable to talk about knowledge from data without knowledge from simulations. This opens up an important set of methodological questions for those philosophers of science who are interested in scientific practice.

Sonja Amadae engaged the audience with a very interesting lecture on agency theory and how group action supervenes on individuals' actions. While the usual focus of agency theory is on corporate actors comprised of human members, Sonja considered hybrid actors encompassing human agents and artificially intelligent networks. She reflected on how they integrate information and on the normative questions that arise from this process.

Finally, Philip Kitcher's plenary talk offered a historical overview of the last century in philosophy of science, focusing on the kind of audience that philosophers of science have addressed over time. As Kitcher's talk enables us to reflect on the current state of philosophy of science, as it also emerges from the EPSA, let me spend a few more words on his argument.

Kitcher's overview started from the logical positivists and their manifesto for a "scientific philosophy", whose focus then shifted to the problems of confirmation, the laws of nature, the function of models and scientific realism. Kitcher went through several other crucial steps in the philosophy of science, ranging from Feyerabend and Kuhn to the Stanford School and the work on the metaphysics of causation. Within this overview, he identified as a particularly significant turning point, the lec-

ture to the Philosophy of Science Association, delivered thirty years ago by its then President Arthur Fine. In that lecture, Fine declared that the philosophy of science was dead, and that its legitimate successor was the philosophy of the *special sciences*.

Kitcher invited us to challenge this view. In his view, there is more to philosophy than being scientifically informed and there is more to philosophers' work than expertise in the special sciences. Kitcher's worry is that the role of values in science has been gradually removed from the discipline, and he is concerned that the topic should be brought back into the picture, also as a way to connect with the general public.

Now, given that EPSA offers a portrait of current philosophy of science, we can ask ourselves: how does Kitcher's view reflect the state of the art? How influential was the lecture that Fine gave thirty years ago? And how much attention do we pay to the role of values as compared to the special sciences and to general philosophy of science?

A quick look at the distribution of the talks per topic can help us to address these questions. Out of a total of 120 talks, 14 symposia and 13 posters, there were 47 talks in *general philosophy of science*, including *formal philosophy of science* (plus 6 symposia and 5 posters). The *philosophy of the special sciences* had 112 talks, 8 symposia and 7 posters. Talks that address the problem of *values* or of non-epistemic factors in science numbered 7 plus one poster. For the distribution within the special sciences, see the graph below.

This is just a rough summary that leaves several issues aside, such as how best to classify talks; however, at least at first glance, the overview squares quite well with Kitcher's picture. Taken together, the philosophies of the special sciences largely outnumber general philosophy of science (55% to 31%). A move towards values appears to be still in its infancy, but an interesting comparison will perhaps already be possible at the next EPSA. If Kitcher's programmatic talk made history, we can expect an increase in contributions on the topic of values in science in the future.

Speaking of which, EPSA 2019 will be hosted by the University of Geneva, headed by Marcel Weber. The new president of EPSA is Samir Okasha, who takes over the position that Stephan Hartmann has held for the past four years. While thanking Stephan and his group for the great work they did for EPSA in the past four years, let us wish the best of luck to Samir Okasha for the years to come. Geneva, remember, is just next door to CERN. This gives us a great opportunity to organize an excursion, perhaps with the help of some of the many the philosophers of physics in our association. The other 80% are looking forward. Hope to see you in Geneva!

CHIARA LISCIANDRA
University of Groningen

Calls for Papers

SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY AND INFERENCES: special issue of *Topoi*, deadline 15 October.

DISAGREEMENT: PERSPECTIVES FROM ARGUMENTATION THEORY AND EPISTEMOLOGY: special issue of *Topoi*, deadline 31 October.

FORMAL MODELS OF SCIENTIFIC INQUIRY: special issue of *Journal*

for General Philosophy of Science, deadline 1 December.

NEW DIRECTIONS IN THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF MODALITY: special issue of *Synthese*, deadline 31 December.

DISSEMINATION CORNER

The Logic of Conceivability

Imagination in Rome Last time, Franz introduced the project the Logic of Conceivability and discussed some of the logical issues we aim to address. This time, I will say more about a philosophical issue that we engage with: *Modal Epistemology*. Modal Epistemology concerns issues about *how we can know what is possible and necessary*. For example, consider the couch that you want to move and you wonder whether there is a way to get the couch through the door. That is, you wonder whether *it is possible* that the couch fits through the door. This is a very mundane, everyday situation and modal epistemology aims to explain *how* we acquire (or fail to acquire) such knowledge. Obviously, there are also less mundane questions of this sort such as whether it is possible that this table is made out of ice, or whether it is possible whether there is transparent iron. (Peter has an interesting [paper](#) on the distinction between mundane and 'exotic' possibilities, following work by Peter van Inwagen.)

Now, as you remember, in work by Franz on the logic of imagination (e.g., [here](#)); imagination is allowed to 'reach the impossible'. That is, in certain, restricted cases, we can imagine the impossible. However, one of the oldest accounts of how we acquire knowledge of possibility (and necessity) is through *the use of imagination* (this goes, at least, back to Hume and Descartes). But, if we can imagine the impossible, how can imagination then be a good guide to what is possible and necessary? We will not solve the issue here, but let me make some remarks about it. First of all, note that it is (still) very controversial to hold that we can imagine the impossible. So, we will need to argue for this in and of itself. Secondly, if we allow our imagination to reach the impossible, then we need to make some remarks with regards to modal epistemology—i.e., if not imagination, then what is a reliable guide to the possible?

There are many theories of modal epistemology that are currently discussed in the literature (e.g., Timothy Williamson's *counterfactual analysis* is one of them, as is George Bealer's *modal intuitions account*) and which one is most suitable for a modal epistemology constitutes a large part of the *philosophical* side of the Logic of Conceivability project. For example, last June the *Conceivability and Modality* conference at the Sapienza University in Rome revolved around these issues and the Logic of Conceivability project was well represented. All of us were present and both Franz and myself had the opportunity to speak at the conference, alongside Albert Cassullo, Boris Kment, Tito Magri, Antonella Mallozzi, Daniel Nolan, Jonathan Schaffer, Anand Vaidya, and Barbara Vetter.

Franz presented new work on aboutness in imagination. That is, the talk aimed to address the question of what we can imagine, *given a certain input*. Franz develops a new model theoretic framework, using only possible worlds, where he incorporates the notion of 'aboutness'. This captures the idea that our imaginary developments (have to) remain *on topic*. Franz' work on this resulted in another publication under the LoC-flag (more on this below). My presentation concerned a more philo-

sophical analysis of imagination and in particular how imagination can figure into a theory of modal epistemology. The aim of my presentation was to critically evaluate a recent attempt to build an imagination-based modal epistemology. For, as should be clear by now, we at the Logic of Conceivability project (or at least some of us), think that we *can* imagine the impossible.

More Conceiving People When Franz wrote the last entry, we were hiring. Now that we have it is time to introduce you to the complete Logic of Conceivability dream-team. As noted, the principal investigator is Franz Berto, with Peter Hawke as the first four-year postdoc, and me as the PhD candidate of the project. In addition, we hired two more four-year postdocs and it is my pleasure to introduce you to [Aybüke Özgün](#) and [Karolina Krzyżanowska](#).

Aybüke works on Dynamic Epistemic Logics, which she analyses using mathematical techniques from topology. She will join us in October, right after she has defended her PhD, which is a joint degree from the Institute for Logic, Language, and Computation and LORIA, CNRS, Université de Lorraine under the supervision of Hans van Ditmarsch, Nick Bezhanishvili, and Sonja Smets.

Karolina works in the psychology of reasoning and, in particular, the semantics and pragmatics of conditionals and how we use these in reasoning. She finished her PhD at the University of Groningen under the supervision of Igor Douven, where she worked on an analysis of conditionals from both a philosophical and empirical perspective. Currently, she is a postdoc at the LMU Munich, where she works with Stephan Hartmann on the Scientific Reasoning and Argumentation project.

We are really happy that both Aybüke and Karolina will join us.

More Conceived Outputs Since the last post, we have not sat still and there are more articles out under our project's flag. First of all, Franz has published a joint paper with Rohan French, Dave Ripley, and Graham Priest in response to Williamson's rejection of counterpossibles. The paper, [Williamson on Counterpossibles](#), evaluates and responds to all objections given by Williamson and then they go on to propose a simple semantics for a non-vacuous counterpossibles.

Secondly, as I mentioned above, Franz has published his paper on [Aboutness in Imagination](#). In it, he develops a modal framework for imagination that incorporates aboutness conditions in a logic for imagination, using only possible worlds. This is different from his previous paper, where he presents a logic of imagination with non-normal, or impossible, worlds.

There is more work in the pipelines, so keep your eyes open for what's to come.

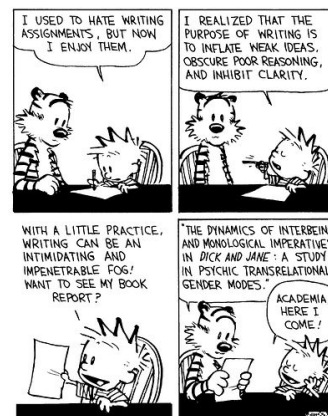
TOM SCHOONEN
University of Amsterdam

WHAT'S HOT IN . . .

Medieval Reasoning

Cryptic writing is a cornerstone of a layperson's perception of academia; however, there's often a bit of truth in stereotypes. That academic writing is more often than not unnecessarily obscure, muddy, and pointlessly verbose isn't merely

a layman's misconception, but a real issue about which most academics love to complain. Academic-ese is the stylistic equivalent of showing up to a formal tea party wearing white socks and sandals: it's only comfortable for the one doing it. While some fields are more affected than others, at some point almost all of us have attended an utterly incomprehensible talk or stumbled upon an article that, while being in our own sub-subfield, was so sibylline that we felt like we had to possess some kind of paranormal divinatory skills just to get the gist of it. And even when a text is comprehensible, chances are that nonetheless it's dreadfully boring despite a genuine interest in the topic or the soundness of its thesis. There are also funny and witty academic papers, but they are few and far between. Maybe academic-ese is a lot like the common cold that one catches on the bus to work when the flu is going around: if most people around you have it, no matter how careful you are, after a few days you are going to come home with a runny nose. No-one is immune. Whoever is without sin may cast the first stone... yet in academia we love casting stones – it's our job – even though we are an undeniably sinful lot. But why does academic writing stink so much? That is the question. Among others, Steven Pinker tried to answer it in an excellent (and unusually well written) article, that you can find [here](#).



Pinker does an outstanding job of analysing some of the most common and obnoxious features of the academic style, while measuring it against the stylistic ideal for expository prose: that is, the classic style of 17th century French essayists. Academic-ese should aim for clarity and to be informative, however it often complicates things unnecessarily, using the kind of hyper-technical jargon that's the author's idiolect, indulging in excessive meta-discourse, and being overly apologetic, self-referential and abstract. The assumption that the reader knows exactly what the author knows is the academic writer's original sin; incidentally, were things so, writing a paper would be completely pointless – and good riddance if the paper happens to be unreadable. On the other hand the classic style tries to keep it simple, even deceptively so: classic essayists go for a plain and smooth prose, preferring the concrete to the abstract; they present the facts and results of their research, leading their readers along respectfully, under the assumption that the readers are not omniscient but that they are intelligent enough to both know that these are complicated matters and to understand them if explained properly.

Now – you might wonder – what does this have to do with medieval reasoning? Quite a bit, actually: the only writing style with a worse reputation than academic-ese is the medieval Scholastic style. Humanist writers carried out a veritable defamatory campaign against Scholasticism and it was so effective that almost anyone (who doesn't study the Middle Ages for a living) still associates "Scholastic" with pedantic, prolix and overly subtle hair-splitting. It's not even a calumny, at least not entirely: Scholastic prose looks just as specialised and occa-

sionally convoluted as any stereotypically bad academic paper. Not only is medieval philosophical Latin padded out with technical terms that are far too reminiscent of academic-ese jargon, but it is also a ways away from the polished and ornate Ciceronian prose (so dear to Scholastics' Renaissance detractors) as anything can possibly be. Albeit just as artificial as its medieval counterpart, Renaissance Latin is undeniably prettier: the language of Scholastic philosophy is often just as bumbling and coarse as a good chunk of academic English; moreover, medieval Latin is a second language for everybody – so no witty and fancy native speakers there. Nevertheless, not only is Scholastic style's ill reputation largely undeserved, but it also deserves to be granted a place next to the classic style as a model of neat expository prose. Scholasticism is, first and foremost, a method of enquiry, focused on the analysis of texts and philosophical issues – here “philosophical” is broadly intended to include theological matters, scientific problems and whatnot. Scholastics' most infamous tool is, without a doubt, the ‘quaestio’ (question), used extensively both as a teaching device and in writing. Around the second half of the 13th century the quaestio reaches its standard structure, which goes roughly as follows: (1) there is a whether-question (utrum) with two opposite possible answers; (2) the first possible answer is presented along with the arguments supporting it; (3) the second possible answer (sed contra) is presented along with the arguments supporting it; (4) a solution is reached (responsio) either by picking one of the two answers previously presented or by outlining a third conciliatory position; (5) all the previous arguments supporting the discharged answer are refuted one by one.

How is this supposed to be obscure? It looks like a very sensible and linear method to me. Certainly, with its relentless sequences of proofs and refutations, the average quaestio is not as pretty to read as a fine philosophical dialogue or a wittingly written classic essay, and very few would read it for literary enjoyment; but it is brutally efficient philosophy. The structure of a quaestio is a powerful tool, and for some aspects it complements the classic essay nicely: while classical essayists present their results and support them by avoiding self-reference and meta-discourses, Scholastic writers stage their reasoning process, showing their analysis of the issue at hand, the pros and cons of its possible solutions, and then finally reaching a supported conclusion. This is not to say that Scholastic quaestions are always easy to follow and that their arguments are always evident and sound: as long as there has been philosophy, there have been bad philosophers as well – and even the best ones sometimes require some effort in interpretation and reconstruction. On top of that, the technical terminology of medieval philosophy is indeed not obvious to a modern reader and not everything is always clearly spelled out, despite quaestio's regimented and systematic structure. However, many medieval theories and terms – that to us are just irksome and puzzling – would have been familiar and commonplace for the average freshmen in the 13th or 14th century; mutatis mutandis, the same cannot be said of our academic vernacular at its worst.

Overall, the strength of the Scholastic quaestio lies in its structure; it is there that we can pick up a few writing tips from our medieval colleagues: worst case scenario, we would have made a structured and systematic argument – and our reader would at least be aware of what our problem was and how we attempted to solve it. Even lacking the smoothness and polish of Renaissance prose, the quaestio gets the job done efficiently

and, in a sense, elegantly: it might not be the prettiest gown at the party, but it's still a step up from the white socks and sandals of bad academic writing. And besides, wearing an evening dress in the afternoon would be quite out of place and outrageously gauche.

GRAZIANA CIOLA

Philosophy, Scuola Normale Superiore, Pisa

Evidence-Based Medicine

It's that time of year again: [The 27th First Annual Ig Nobel Prize Ceremony](#). Essentially, the Ig Nobel prizes aim to honour ‘Achievements that first make people laugh, and then make people think’. In other words, ‘The prizes are intended to celebrate the unusual, honor the imaginative—and spur people's interest in science, medicine, and technology’. The award ceremony takes place every September. And this year's ceremony can be viewed on [the Improbable Research YouTube channel](#).

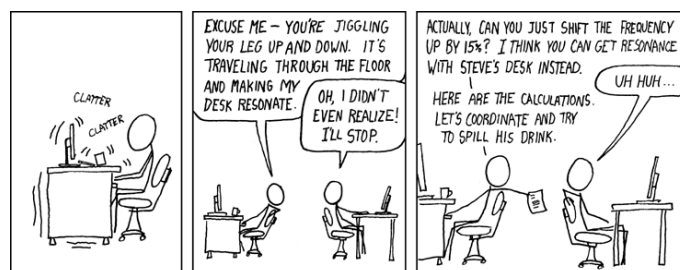
The fluid dynamics prize this year was awarded for research completed by a then high-school student, Jiwon Han. His [research](#) looked at why spillage occurs when a person is a walking along with a mug of coffee. He gives [a brief talk](#) on this research on the [TEDx Talks](#) channel on [YouTube](#). The main physics prize was also on the topic of fluid dynamics. This was awarded to Marc-Antoine Fardin for his work on whether a cat can be both a liquid and a solid. His [paper](#) features photos of some pretty amorphous cats.

As ever, medicine was well-represented. The main medicine prize went to Pierre Royet, David Meunier, Nicolas Torquet, Anne-Marie Mouly and Tao Jiang. This was for [an fMRI study](#) measuring the extent to which certain individuals are disgusted by cheese. There were also some other medicine-related prizes awarded. The nutrition prize was awarded for the first [report](#) of human blood in the diet of the hairy-legged vampire bat, which was authored by Fernanda Ito, Enrico Bernard, and Rodrigo A. Torres. They point out that this research has implications for public health because of the increased risk in the transmission of rabies. The anatomy prize went to James A. Heathcote for his [work](#) on the important topic of why old men have big ears. And the peace prize went to Milo Puhon, Alex Suarez, Christian Lo Cascio, Alfred Zahn, Markus Heitz, and Otto Braendli for their randomized controlled trial looking at [didgeridoo playing as an alternative treatment for obstructive sleep apnoea syndrome](#). They conclude that ‘[r]egular didgeridoo playing is an effective treatment alternative well accepted by patients with moderate obstructive sleep apnoea syndrome’.

Until next year, some more details about the Ig Nobel Prize are available on the [Improbable Research website](#).

MICHAEL WILDE

Philosophy, Kent



EVENTS

OCTOBER

PstTrth: Is Post-modernism to Blame for Our Post-truth World? London School of Economics, London, 2 October.
LOGPROB: Is Logic About Probability? Pavia, Italy, 3 October.
HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHY OF COMPUTING: Brno, 4–7 October.
NTiE: New Trends in Epistemology, Hamburg, 5–7 October.
ABPHILO: Williamson on Abductive Philosophy, Vienna, 7 October.
MARU: Moral and Rational Uncertainty, University of Reading, 9 October.
RM: Reverse Mathematics, Munich, 9–11 October.
BS: Basic Statistics (Understanding & Analysing Data), Edinburgh, 12–13 October.
A&E: Analysis and Explication—Traditional and Contemporary Approaches, Heinrich Heine University, Duesseldorf, 20–21 October.
RLHRC: Representation Learning for Human and Robot Cognition, Bielefeld University, Germany, 17 October.
CLAR: Concept Learning and Reasoning in Conceptual Spaces, Ruhr-University Bochum, 24–25 October.
DTT: Determinism, Time, and Totality, Umeåa University, 25–27 October.
WiC: Where is There Causation? Umeåa University, 27–28 October.
NNiM: Nordic Network in Metaphysics Conference, University of Tampere, Finland, 26–27 October.
SoSR: The Structure of Scientific Revolutions Workshop, Durham University, 31 October.

NOVEMBER

MRiS: International Workshop Models and Representation in Science, University of Edinburgh, 6 November.
LogWi: Logic in the Wild, Ghent University, 9–10 November.
DD: Debating Debates, New College of the Humanities, London, 10 November.
MSASK: Memory, Self, and Self-Knowledge, University of York, 21 November.
LogPoT: Logic and Philosophy of Time: Themes from Prior, Copenhagen, 22–24 November.

COURSES AND PROGRAMMES

Courses

COMPUTER SIMULATION METHODS: Summer School, High Performance Computing Center Stuttgart (HLRS), 25–29 September.

Programmes

APHIL: MA/PhD in Analytic Philosophy, University of Barcelona.
MASTER PROGRAMME: MA in Pure and Applied Logic, University of Barcelona.
DOCTORAL PROGRAMME IN PHILOSOPHY: Language, Mind and Practice, Department of Philosophy, University of Zurich, Switzerland.
DOCTORAL PROGRAMME IN PHILOSOPHY: Department of Philosophy, University of Milan, Italy.

HPSM: MA in the History and Philosophy of Science and Medicine, Durham University.

MASTER PROGRAMME: in Statistics, University College Dublin.

LoPhiSC: Master in Logic, Philosophy of Science and Epistemology, Pantheon-Sorbonne University (Paris 1) and Paris-Sorbonne University (Paris 4).

MASTER PROGRAMME: in Artificial Intelligence, Radboud University Nijmegen, the Netherlands.

MASTER PROGRAMME: Philosophy and Economics, Institute of Philosophy, University of Bayreuth.

MA IN COGNITIVE SCIENCE: School of Politics, International Studies and Philosophy, Queen's University Belfast.

MA IN LOGIC AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF MATHEMATICS: Department of Philosophy, University of Bristol.

MA PROGRAMMES: in Philosophy of Science, University of Leeds.

MA IN LOGIC AND PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE: Faculty of Philosophy, Philosophy of Science and Study of Religion, LMU Munich.

MA IN LOGIC AND THEORY OF SCIENCE: Department of Logic of the Eotvos Lorand University, Budapest, Hungary.

MA IN METAPHYSICS, LANGUAGE, AND MIND: Department of Philosophy, University of Liverpool.

MA IN MIND, BRAIN AND LEARNING: Westminster Institute of Education, Oxford Brookes University.

MA IN PHILOSOPHY: by research, Tilburg University.

MA IN PHILOSOPHY, SCIENCE AND SOCIETY: TiLPS, Tilburg University.

MA IN PHILOSOPHY OF BIOLOGICAL AND COGNITIVE SCIENCES: Department of Philosophy, University of Bristol.

MA IN RHETORIC: School of Journalism, Media and Communication, University of Central Lancashire.

MA PROGRAMMES: in Philosophy of Language and Linguistics, and Philosophy of Mind and Psychology, University of Birmingham.

MRiS IN METHODS AND PRACTICES OF PHILOSOPHICAL RESEARCH: Northern Institute of Philosophy, University of Aberdeen.

MSc IN APPLIED STATISTICS: Department of Economics, Mathematics and Statistics, Birkbeck, University of London.

MSc IN APPLIED STATISTICS AND DATAMINING: School of Mathematics and Statistics, University of St Andrews.

MSc IN ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE: Faculty of Engineering, University of Leeds.

MA IN REASONING

A programme at the University of Kent, Canterbury, UK. Gain the philosophical background required for a PhD in this area.

Optional modules available from Psychology, Computing, Statistics, Social Policy, Law, Biosciences and History.

MSc IN COGNITIVE & DECISION SCIENCES: Psychology, University College London.

MSc IN COGNITIVE SYSTEMS: Language, Learning, and Reasoning, University of Potsdam.

MSc IN COGNITIVE SCIENCE: University of Osnabrück, Germany.

MSc IN COGNITIVE PSYCHOLOGY/NEUROPSYCHOLOGY: School of Psychology, University of Kent.

MSc IN LOGIC: Institute for Logic, Language and Computation, University of Amsterdam.

MSc IN MIND, LANGUAGE & EMBODIED COGNITION: School of Philosophy, Psychology and Language Sciences, University of Edinburgh.

MSc IN PHILOSOPHY OF SCIENCE, TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIETY: University of Twente, The Netherlands.

MRES IN COGNITIVE SCIENCE AND HUMANITIES: LANGUAGE, COMMUNICATION AND ORGANIZATION: Institute for Logic, Cognition, Language, and Information, University of the Basque Country (Donostia San Sebastián).

OPEN MIND: International School of Advanced Studies in Cognitive Sciences, University of Bucharest.

RESEARCH MASTER IN PHILOSOPHY AND ECONOMICS: Erasmus University Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

JOBS AND STUDENTSHIPS

Jobs

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR: in Epistemology, California State University, Fullerton, Open until filled.

POST-DOC: in Philosophy of Physics in Lausanne, Switzerland, deadline 8 October.

PROFESSORSHIP: in Statistics, University of Bath, deadline 16 October.

READER: in Statistics, University of Bath, deadline 16 October.

LECTURER: in Applied Mathematics, University of Bath, deadline 16 October.

2 RESEARCH ASSOCIATES: in Artificial Intelligence For Data Analytics, Alan Turing Institute, London, deadline 23 October.

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR: in Analytic Philosophy, Stanford University, 1 November.

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR: in Metaphysics and Epistemology, University of Toronto, deadline 1 November.

Studentships

2 PhD's: in Philosophy of Physics, Lausanne, Switzerland, deadline 8 October.

PHD: in Statistics and Probability, University of Sussex, deadline 1 December.

